



## **northern harrier**

*Circus cyaneus*

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Aves
Order:	Falconiformes
Family:	Accipitridae

### **Features**

An adult northern harrier is 17 to 24 inches long. This hawk has a narrow body and wings and a long tail. There is a white patch at the base of the tail. The body of the male is gray, while the female is brown-and-cream streaked. The underside of the wing has a dark tip.

### **Natural History**

The northern harrier winters in Central and South America. It lives in marshes or fields. It eats amphibians, birds, insects, mammals, and reptiles. It flies near the ground, gliding over an open field or marsh looking for food. The wings form a shallow "V" during flight. While migrating, the northern harrier flies alone. Its call is "pee, pee, pee." Spring migrants begin arriving in March. Nesting occurs from May through July. The nest is built on the ground and is made of twigs and grasses. Two to five blue-white eggs are laid. Fall migrants begin appearing in July. A few winter in central and southern Iowa, especially in

years with little snow. Habitat loss is the most important factor limiting distribution and causing continued declines.

### **Habitats**

Natural lakes and prairie marshes; wet prairies and fens

### **Iowa Status**

endangered in Iowa; native

The northern harrier is endangered because of loss and fragmentation of prairie habits and management practices, including mowing and burning of grassy areas.

### **Iowa Range**

summer: northern half of Iowa and scattered in southern Iowa in suitable habitats; migrant: statewide

### **Bibliography**

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.  
*Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.